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ABSTRACT

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Technical Assistance Bulletin

Yerba Buena: A School-based Interagency Team Approach

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

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Summary

Yerba Buena High School in San Jose, California has implemented a school-based, interagency team approach for delivery of a variety of social services to students, their families and community members. In the early 1970's the school secured a grant, hired a "crisis counselor", and set up a 24-hour hotline staffed by professionals and volunteers. An extensive counseling program was also developed at the time. Subsequent to the grant period, the school has continued to provide a number of social services under local funding.

The Problem

Our nation's schools are an integral part of the communities they serve. They mirror both the health and environment of the community to a certain extent. Traditionally, the school has been viewed as an isolated unit, apart from the larger community. Clearly that concept is dated. The primary job of the schools is to educate. Yet the problems of the community and of the students may overwhelm and interfere with that process. The problems that students bring with them to school must be dealt with and recognized, before education can begin.

In the 60's and 70's Yerba Buena High School in San Jose, California was faced with increasing violence, vandalism, and juvenile delinquency. The neighborhood surrounding Yerba Buena High School contained approximately 85,000 people; of the school's 1,850 students, 50% were chicanos, 28% were white, and 15% were black. Thirty percent of the families were on welfare. As school and community officials noted, the area "had its share of crime and violence"--and Yerba Buena High School was the central point in the neighborhood.

The Solution

In 1972, Yerba Buena High School initiated a school-based, interagency team approach for social service delivery with the aim of lessening youth problems in school. The plan brought services for the students, their families, and the community into the school. A crisis counselor was hired, a 24-hour hotline was set up, and activities of school officials, social agencies, and police department, and other officials were joined together to create a comprehensive program of counseling and aid for those in need.

Beginnings of the Plan

In the early 1960's, the East Side Union High School District in San Jose, California, established programs designed to examine youth problems. It soon became apparent that the external manifestation of youth problems--everything from truancy and drug abuse to violence--were linked directly to problems in the community.

In the late 1960's, the school district instituted two programs linking the school and community, the Office of the Home-School

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Liaison and an Educational Park Study. The Office of the Home-School Liaison was comprised of representatives from the neighborhood who were hired to improve and maintain home-school relations. Teachers and counselors were also encouraged to make as many contacts with the home as possible. The Educational Park Study comprised of students, city and county leaders, parents, and teachers, met to develop preventive strategies for meeting future educational needs. One strategy suggested by the parent's committee was to bring together agencies in a cooperative effort to provide services to the school.

In 1972, a master plan was developed by parents, students, teachers, and agency professionals to build linkages and create an alliance between the school and community. The philosophy of the plan centered on eight premises:

1. The neighborhood is the smallest unit in terms of measuring need, delivering services and evaluating results.

2. When services at the neighborhood level are increased and improved, the school in that neighborhood will benefit.

3. The school is an established institution within the neighborhood. It is accessible to people. Both students and parents accept it, and sometimes expect more services than it can deliver.

4. Since the school is expected by its community to deliver more than simple academic services, it must be supported by a staff of professionals who represent key community service agencies.

5. The school must not jeopardize its primary function--education. That function must not be diluted by diversion of educational staff; rather it must be protected by the presence of a support staff.

6. The school possesses a professional staff that works with the adolescent on a daily basis. Its counselors, administrators, and home/school liaison consultants can be a rich source of information for the community professional. Shared information should result in increasingly effective and efficient action on the part of the community service agencies.

7. The school has the potential to unite the community by bringing together professionals from various fields.

8. The school possesses both facilities and skilled personnel for carrying out follow-up programs once an immediate crisis is resolved.

Yerba Buena High School thus became a center for delivery of various social services and other services in the community. An agency support system and an interagency team comprise the backbone of the plan. A school counselor, referred to as the crisis counselor, coordinates all services.

Agency Support System

Community agencies were contacted to supply a number of services ranging from special tutoring to the supply of food and clothing. Twenty agencies joined to support the project, and were available as needed.

The Interagency Team Concept

The interagency team was formed of representatives from the major community agencies and organizations and included a social worker, a probation officer, a parent-teaching training specialist, a psychiatrist from the Stanford University Medical Center, and two home-school liaison consultants. The team concept provided a mechanism for a restructuring of delivery of services. The school became the center for service delivery and a unifying factor in the community. The advantages of "team" delivery of service were many: vital information about a student and family could be communicated easily, services were consolidated and easy for clients to reach, and there was no duplication of services.

The following are programs in the Yerba Buena Plan developed during the first three years:

1. "Early Identification" Program. This program reaches out and works with crisis-prone students

at the 6th, 7th, and 8th grade levels giving them special attention. Those suffering from learning disabilities are bussed to Yerba Buena daily for a two hour session in intensive reading and math. Each youngster is also assigned a high school student who acts as his special tutor. When the grade school student has reached a normal reading and math level, he/she is phased out of the program.

2. Special Educational Prescriptions. Special courses and tutorials are prescribed for the student in crisis. A student can be placed in an opportunity class led by one teacher. An individual curriculum can be followed, and when the teacher and the student feel that he/she is ready to move back into the normal school structure, the student is permitted to do so. Follow-up on the student is continued.

3. 24-Hour Hotline. A 24-hour crisis line established in the school provides professional services on a walk-in and outreach basis. Twenty-four volunteer professionals are assigned on-call duty throughout a given month. The objective is to intercept and resolve a crisis in the neighborhood where it arises before it becomes a problem for the larger community and, more specifically, for the criminal justice system.

4. Teacher Crisis Training. This training is handled by the Crisis Counselor. It provides techniques for keeping the peace and provides uniform guidelines concerning disciplinary philosophy and methods.

5. Parent Education. Parents identified as having severe problems in their relations with their children are referred to a parent-training specialist for counseling or workshop groups.

6. Peer Counseling. Students who have experienced crisis, survived it, and are now in the educational system are probably in the best position to have some positive influence on those youngsters still in a state of crisis. At Yerba Buena, peer counseling is an important part of the program. Some former crisis students are now engaged in counseling other students who find themselves in a similar set of circumstances.

Results

Yerba Buena's chief counselor, Jerry Mullins, notes the following results:

- Virtually no crime, violence, or vandalism at Yerba Buena since the program was initiated eight years ago.
- Excellent relations between the school and the neighborhood it serves.
- Greater respect and loyalty from students.
- 96% of the hardcore crisis (project) students remained in school: grade point averages increased, attendance improved, disciplinary referrals decreased, all were involved with one or more agencies outside the school.

Replication Issues

A program like Yerba Buena's can be replicated wherever a school is faced with conflict and violence and is interested in coordinating community and school social services in reponse to those problems.

The Yerba Buena Plan has been adapted in other parts of the country according to the needs of the school, district or county implementing the plan. If effective leadership and coordination exists among those who are in positions of authority, then rapid implementation of the plan can take place. Interagency cooperation requires commitment at the top levels of authority, for if interagency teamwork is to be achieved, representatives from the various agencies involved must be prepared to redefine their roles in relation to the interagency concept. Without top management approval, this is difficult.

Organizing The Program

Organizing a program like Yerba Buena's is a complex process that requires careful

consideration, planning, and garnering of resources and support. The following are some suggested procedures for setting up a program. A checklist developed by Yerba Buena for identifying programs and solutions is included as Attachment A. A questionnaire for students, parents, and teachers is included as Attachment B.

- Make a thorough needs assessment of the school and its neighborhood; include input from city officials, probation officers, and other agencies.
- Isolate the major problem areas for the school and neighborhood. Study the relationship between the school and social agencies; estimate the number of social workers and probation officers working in the community; evaluate communication between the school and community.
- Identify a small nucleus of school staff officials who are willing to work in planning and implementing the program.
- Identify parents and parent organizations who may be willing to help, including the PTA.
- Survey students, parents, and teachers for their reactions to the program.
- Initiate communications with agencies in the community, and begin building the project's support system by asking for written commitments from agencies.
- Hire a special counselor or professional in the school to coordinate the program.
- Set up a neighborhood advisory board to maintain continual input and support from the community.
- Begin the planning process by bringing all representatives of the school and community together to build a strategy that will confront the specific problems of the community.

Implementing the Program

The following are some suggested activities to aid in implementing such a program:

- Sponsor a summer workshop for staff members and participants. Review objectives and procedures, and establish coordination.
- Develop an agency support system during the summer preceding the school year. Encourage agency members to agree on the roles they will play, the procedures that will be followed, and the calendar of events for the upcoming year.
- Identify crisis-prone students and families and prepare for any service that may be necessary.
- Discuss educational "prescriptions" for students--examine student files when necessary, make assessments and develop strategies to avoid problems.
- Develop and hold parent "effectiveness sessions".
- Sponsor teacher in-service programs to explain the program and its objectives, and the teacher's role.

Required Resources

The Yerba Buena Plan began operation with a $27,000 grant and was provided with an additional $30,000 from a county revenue-sharing program. Among the costs incurred by the Yerba Buena program were the $23,000 a year salary for the crisis counselor, and the combined $24,000 salary of two home-liaison officials. The school also paid for the part-time duty of two policemen who worked a total of 3 hours a day for the 176-day school year, and a $10-a-day stipend to those volunteers who were on call for the hotline. The school hired a part-time secretary for the first year of the program but did not renew the secretary's employment for the second year.

Funding for the program varies depending on the amount of funding available, the number of social agencies working in the program, and the relationship between the school and those agencies. The school attempts to secure the social, police, and other services on a "lend basis" to avoid any incurment of costs.